



2013-2014 AESN Case Study

School: Arden Elementary **District:** SD71 Comox Valley

Area of focus: Transitions

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Question / focus area: What can students discover about themselves as learners and human beings when we bring younger and older students together for a variety of “real-world” learning experiences? How can we connect or interweave these learning experiences to the indigenous ways of knowing and how does this affect our students?

Scanning: We decided to get a grade 7-9 class together with a grade 1 class on a number of occasions to do experiential learning with a focus on the *First Peoples Principals of Learning* (FNESC). We engaged in shared learning experiences such as visiting salmon streams, indigenous plant walks, storytelling, reading First Nations legends and stories, and we studied local First Nations artist George Littlechild. The experiences that were the most important were seeing the students teaching and learning from each other. Having the older students visit the elementary school brought back memories and impromptu visits with teachers, and having the elementary students visit the middle school helped break down some of the barriers between the schools and helped the younger ones (and their parents) have less trepidation about the middle school.

Focus: One of our driving questions was how can we create authentic learning experiences that are experiential, holistic and incorporate indigenous knowledge as well as develop relationships between Lake Trail Middle School and Arden Elementary. Other underlying questions from our Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement are: how can we increase Aboriginal students’ sense of belonging, and how can we increase the awareness in understanding of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit history, traditions and culture for all students?

We brought in community members including Elders and district Aboriginal staff to interact with the students. The storytelling presentation and the writing workshop were attended by students from Lake Trail Middle School and Arden Elementary School. We made connections with community members and enhanced a sense of belonging through indigenous ways of knowing through experiential learning, cross-generational

and multi age roles and responsibilities. One of the grade 1 students said “that was the best field trip ever” after seeing Wes Nahanne in his traditional regalia engaged in storytelling. The parent drivers who brought the grade 1 students to Lake Trail also commented on how much they enjoyed the storytelling session by Wes and they said it was one of the best school events that they had ever been to.

Hunch: In our district we have noticed a lack of exploration and understanding of the indigenous ways of knowing in our classrooms and schools. We are hoping to learn more about the value in experiential learning and how to celebrate and share different ways of looking at what it means to be a learner and what authentic learning looks like in practice. Traditional curriculum models that are perhaps more Eurocentric than indigenous have contributed to a narrow view of what it looks like to be a learner. indigenous ways of knowing, and our understanding of what success looks like in school is beginning to be broadened to include real life experiences, and experiential learning situations that are more holistic in nature.

New professional learning: As a group of teachers we would like to deepen our understanding of the indigenous ways of knowing. We have been attending the FNEC conference every year to hear from other educators and this year we presented a session on “Honouring Our Own Stories: Helping students tell their stories based on oral tradition.” Presenting at FNEC helped us further our understanding of the importance and value of the work that we do. We will continue to team-teach our lessons and share our own understanding and teachings of the indigenous ways of knowing.

Taking action:

- As a formative assessment piece, we would like to do a teacher and student survey about self-awareness and indigenous ways of knowing and how they are successful.
- We will connect high school and middle school teachers with elementary teachers to create partnerships.
- These partnerships will liaise with Aboriginal education staff and community members.
- Depending on needs identified by the surveys done, a variety of activities can be put in place such as Aboriginal storytelling, cultural projects, experiential learning, traditional ecological activities, locally developed curriculum, outdoor education and community visits with our buddy classes.

Checking: We made a difference to student learning, but it feels like it is just the beginning. We will continue to work with classroom teachers to share our understanding of teaching and learning in an indigenous way, and we would like to collect more tangible evidence to demonstrate evidence of growth and the value of the learning experiences.

Reflections/Advice: We learned that incorporating the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* in what we are teaching and learning in schools is a great way to include authentic experiences for students. We have also learned that co-teaching with others is

a way that we can continue to grow and learn as an educator. Shared experiences bring groups of people together and older students get an opportunity to shine when they are in a leadership role with younger students. We would recommend to schools with a similar interest to use local resource people and Elders to help teach the experiences so that students get an authentic experience.

